DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 798 CS 510 179

AUTHOR Chen, Pai-lin; Chung, Deborah S.; Crane, Amanda; Hlavach, Laura; Pierce, Jacqueline; Viall, Elizabeth K.

TITLE Pedagogy under Construction: Learning To Teach Collaboratively.

PUB DATE 1999-03-30

NOTE 35p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (82nd, New Orleans, LA, August 4-7, 1999).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Classroom Research; *Constructivism (Learning); *Cooperative Learning; Educational Research; Higher Education; *Journalism Education; *Mass Media; *Ownership

IDENTIFIERS *Authenticity; *Collaborative Learning

ABSTRACT

Doctoral-level students in a mass communication pedagogy class conducted a quasi-experimental study based entirely on constructivism. The students (n=6) became equal partners with the professor by practicing collaborative learning, ownership, and authenticity. Constructivists see knowledge as actively constructed by learners, not passively acquired from instructors. The students built their own knowledge through selecting the content, teaching the course, choosing projects and assignments, reflecting on the class, assessing the students, and working collaboratively. While some students may not be ready to accept responsibility for their education because of maturity or indoctrination in traditional learning methods, the group believes that the benefits of constructivism outweighs its disadvantages. Results suggest that constructivism should be incorporated into all levels of mass communication higher education. It can be practiced in large classes or lower-level courses as students actively seek knowledge through choosing course content, working in real-world situations, participating in group projects or reports, and giving input on assessment. This breaks students from their dependence on instructors and readies them for lifelong learning where knowledge is constructed among people, not in solitary. Contains 30 references and 2 figures. An appendix contains course objectives, assignments, and a course calendar. (Author/NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 436 798

Pedagogy Under Construction:

Learning to Teach Collaboratively

Pai-lin Chen
visiting scholar, Indiana University
707 Campus View, Bloomington, IN 47408
(812) 859-2175

Deborah S. Chung
doctoral student, School of Journalism, Indiana University
Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 E. 7th St., Bloomington, IN 47405-6201
(812) 857-1266

Amanda Crane
doctoral student, School of Journalism, Indiana University
Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 E. 7th St., Bloomington, IN 47405-6201
(812) 339-9875

Laura Hlavach
doctoral student, School of Journalism, Indiana University
Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 E. 7th St., Bloomington, IN 47405-6201
(812) 339-4261

Jacqueline Pierce
doctoral student, School of Journalism, Indiana University
Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 E. 7th St., Bloomington, IN 47405-6201
(812) 336-3922

Elizabeth K. Viall
doctoral student, School of Journalism, Indiana University
Ernie Pyle Hall, 940 E. 7th St., Bloomington, IN 47405-6201
(812) 332-5186
eviall@indiana.edu

Submitted to AEJMC Teaching Standards Committee, March 30, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
P Chen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 510 179

Abstract

Doctoral-level students conducted a quasi-experimental study in a pedagogy class based entirely on constructivism. The students became equal partners with the professor by practicing collaborative learning, ownership, and authenticity. Constructivists see knowledge as actively constructed by learners, not passively acquired from instructors. The group sees tremendous benefits in constructivism and recommends that it be integrated at all levels of mass communication higher education. Students can make content choices, work with real-world situations, or participate in group projects.

Abstract

Doctoral-level students conducted a quasi-experimental study in a pedagogy class based entirely on constructivism. The students became equal partners with the professor by practicing collaborative learning, ownership, and authenticity. Constructivists see knowledge as actively constructed by learners, not passively acquired from instructors. The students built their own knowledge through selecting the content, teaching the course, choosing projects and assignments, reflecting on the class, assessing the students, and working collaboratively. While some students may not be ready to accept responsibility for their education because of maturity or indoctrination in traditional learning methods, the group believes that the benefits of constructivism outweigh its disadvantages. Constructivism should be incorporated into all levels of mass communication higher education. And it can be practiced in large classes or lower-level courses as students actively seek knowledge through choosing course content, working in real-world situations, participating in group projects or reports, and giving input on assessment. This breaks students from their dependence on instructors and readies them for life-time learning where knowledge is constructed among people, not in solitary.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Usually a teacher's first step to prepare for class is to write a syllabus, and Professor M had copies ready on day one of "Teaching Mass Communications in College." Instead of distributing them, however, he offered class members an option. They could use his detailed, 10-page syllabus — the traditional route. Or they could immediately put constructivist learning theory into practice and choose to build their own syllabus and chart their own course. With this gauntlet dropped, he left them alone to decide.

The class members opted to be constructivists, and this paper reports the participants' observations during and critique of this quasi-experimental study. If learners learn best when they are active, the participants reasoned, how better to study "Teaching Mass Communications in College" than to approach the class as active learners? Constructivists see knowledge as actively constructed by learners, not passively acquired from instructors. For this reason, students learn more effectively when they "own" the process and work collaboratively on tasks that seem real, authentic. Journalism educators often apply some of these constructivist notions in their classes, but rarely to the degree used in this graduate-level pedagogy class.

This paper presents a case study of a constructivist pedagogy class and argues for the use of constructivist theory in mass communication higher education.

Toward a Constructivist Paradigm: A Brief Review of the Literature

The world changes as we employ different perspectives to make observations on our world (Kuhn, 1970). Old theories are discarded or changed when a new theory or idea displays superior power in explaining the world. One such paradigm shift in the teaching field comes with the emergence of constructivism.

"Constructivism" views learning as an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge. Traditional learning theorists view learners as those who passively

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

acquire information during classroom activities. In this perspective, the learning process is nothing but a transportation of information from one mind to another. Constructivists view human beings as active seekers of meaning. Learners build their own knowledge during the learning process, based on each learner's interests and experiences.

In addition, constructivists regard instruction as a process of supporting the building of knowledge rather than communicating knowledge (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). Traditional learning theory views the content domain as central. The role of instructors is mainly in the supply of information. However, constructivists view learning as an activity in context. Thus, the focus of instructional design is placed not only on content, but also on the contexts that support learning activities.

A more recent trend in constructivism is the emphasis on socio-cultural perspectives. Early constructivists put an emphasis on cognitive perspectives, which focus on individual thinkers and their isolated minds. However, recent emphases have been moved toward social-cultural roots of cognition and meaning (Barab & Duffy, in press). For example, Cole and Engestrom (1993) argue that there are cyclical relationships between internalization and externalization at different points in cognitive activities. Perkins (1993) further contends that human intelligence greatly relies on the distributed resources that serve as vehicles of thought.

Lave (1997), on the other hand, views the learners' interactions with the world as not only producing meaning about the social world, but also identities. In other words, individuals are molded partly by the world around them, and learners construct knowledge through interactions with the world.

Along with this perspective of learning is the contention from Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) that knowing and doing are the same. Participating in an activity, then, is

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

learning and understanding. Therefore, learning involves more than acquiring an understanding; learners actually build an increasingly rich understanding of the world as well as the tools they use to understand it.

Constructivism is such a broad term that educators need to identify more functional attributes in order to build constructivist environments. In the current study, three notions were involved in developing a constructive environment for learning: collaborative work, learners' ownership of the process, and authenticity.

Collaborative learning. The notion of "collaborative learning" can be used as a conceptual framework or an instructional strategy. Traditional teaching and instruction employ group work to provide variety in the classroom activities, teach students to work together, share workloads, or promote peer tutoring. In the constructive environment, constructivists emphasize collaborative learning because learning is an inherently social-dialogical process. Constructivists use collaborative work to share alternative viewpoints and challenge, as well as help develop, each alternative view. In particular, constructivists emphasize efforts to promote the dialogical interchange among the group, as well as to help learners develop collaborative reasoning and reflection.

Ownership. The constructivist environment emphasizes that learners are active seekers in the quest for meaning. The notion of active learners has its roots in the work of Dewey (1938). Schoenfeld (1996) takes a further step in exploring the nature of "doing" in active learning. He suggests that learners are engaged in dilemmas, either coming from their performance or from the content-domain itself. Performance includes the efforts toward achieving the goal, and the content-domain is the problem area that he or she chooses to solve. The notion of ownership illustrates that learners are given and assume ownership of the dilemma and the development of a resolution to the problem area. In essence, ownership of inquiry emphasizes that learners bear a right to make decisions about what to learn and,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

therefore, take responsibility for solving problems. In this sense, teachers in the classroom serve not as authorities on content, but rather as learning and problem solving experts.

Authenticity. The notion of authenticity builds on the assumption that classroom activities should be made to be as similar to the real world as possible. Prior researchers (Cognition and technology group, 1990, 1993) identified two types of authenticity: factual authenticity and procedural authenticity. Factual authenticity is when environmental particulars of a task are made to be similar to those of the real world; procedural authenticity is when learner practices are similar to those in which one would be engaged outside of schools. In prior research, authenticity is promoted by both providing a simulated setting and having learners participate in a real-world community (Barab, Squire, & Dueber, 1999).

CONSTRUCTIVISM AND JOURNALISM

Journalism and communication educators may not often use the terms "collaborative learning," "ownership," and "authenticity" when they write about learning and teaching. However, journalism educators are applying these concepts in their classes, sometimes under another guise. What a constructivist educator might term an "authentic" assignment, for example, a journalism instructor is likely to call a "real world" exercise. A journalism educator also is likely to discuss these three concepts as one united whole. After all, in the "authentic" context of "real world" communication — whether the medium is a newspaper, a broadcast, a magazine, a public relations campaign, or an advertisement — writing is inherently collaborative. This might be particularly true in television production (Saferstein, 1992). Because the real world demands collaboration, journalism professors "should give collaborative writing assignments to students while they are still in college so they will be prepared to write collaboratively after they graduate" (Haber, 1994).

Discussion of "collaboration" also comes up fairly frequently in related writing courses,

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

such as classes in English composition and rhetoric (Stewart, 1988); business and technical communication (Belanger & Greer, 1992; Duin, 1991; Beard, Rymer & Williams, 1989; Lay, 1989; Wallace, 1994, Forman, 1991); and information systems development (Franz & Jin, 1995).

Writing is not the only arena to require collaborative learning. One journalism educator recently advocated including a team component in advertising and public relation research classes (Poindexter, 1998). In some journalism classes, the entire product requires collaboration. For example, senior news-editorial students at the University of South Carolina — reporters and feature writers in one group, copy editors and graphic reporters in the other — collaborate to produce a weekly city newspaper (Kornegay, 1991). When reporters who communicate with words work together with those who report with graphics, both groups of students tend to see stories in a broader yet more manageable and understandable way (Kornegay, 1991).

A few journalism and communication educators have written about their experiences with and research into collaborative learning. Even among communication educators, definitions of "collaborative learning" vary somewhat. For purposes of their quasi-experimental field study, Southern Illinois University professors James D. Kelly and Michael Murrie defined a "collaborative student group ... [as] a relatively heterogeneous group of seven or fewer university-level students collaborating as much as possible as equals in terms of status, knowledge, and engagement" (Kelly & Murrie, 1995). Cleveland State University communications professor Jean Dobos described "collaborative learning" or "cooperative learning" as "classroom-based activities in which students work together in small groups to apply and synthesize course concepts" (Dobos, 1996, p. 118). What makes collaborative learning unique, according to Dobos, is its "self-directed peer interaction centered on a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

common task goal." A collaborative learning approach is appropriate not only for group discussions but also for other formats, such as interactive computer sessions and peer commentary on student writing (Dobes, 1996).

This is not to suggest that the size of the overall class, however, constrains the use of collaborative learning techniques. Kelly and Murrie, for example, experimented using collaborative learning techniques along with computer-based interactive multimedia courseware in one module of an introductory mass communication course (Kelly & Murrie, 1995). They reported that use of this collaborative learning approach (versus a more traditional lecture approach) seemed to produce higher factual knowledge test scores and a more positive attitude toward the possibility of a career in mass communications.

As this literature demonstrates, some journalism educators are applying constructivism in their classrooms — at least to some degree. However, none of these reported applications seems to involve the level of commitment to constructivism that was present in the graduate pedagogy course described in this case study.

The Experience of Graduate Journalism Students in a Pedagogy Course Based Entirely on Constructivism

All journalism doctoral students at this university must take a course titled Teaching Mass Communication in College. In fall 1998, four of the school's first-year doctoral students, one third-year doctoral student, and a scholar visiting from Taiwan participated in the class. The latter two students audited the course. The class met twice a week for 90 minutes, although students often stayed past the scheduled time.

The class members' levels of teaching and professional communications experience varied widely. Teaching responsibilities were relatively new to two students, although one had taught writing on the tutorial level at the university for several years. The other four

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

students each had taught college-level communication classes for five years or longer. All together, the six students had spent more than 27 years teaching at public and private universities in the United States and in Taiwan. They also, all together, had spent more than 23 years working as professional communicators at newspapers, at magazines, in public relations, and in book publishing.

While Professor M had been teaching at this university since 1990, this was his first time to teach this pedagogy class. Traditionally, the class had used a mixture of theoretical readings, lecture, discussion, and student teaching to help prepare doctoral students for faculty positions. This semester, Professor M wanted the class to test the usefulness of constructivist ideals and practices in teaching mass communication pedagogy. He hoped to involve the students in all aspects of the course — from determining the content to teaching the course. He also wanted to give them the chance to choose between a traditional or a constructivist approach.

Day One: The challenge, the risks, the fears

Professor M had a continuing e-mail discussion about this pedagogy class with a colleague experimenting with constructivism at another campus. In one of these e-mail exchanges, sent at the very beginning of the semester, Professor M explained his rationale for offering this option. "I want to make the course truly collaborative with the students sharing responsibility for choosing the course objectives, topics, policies, readings, assignments, and evaluation of assignments." He also wanted the students to negotiate and decide what his role as teacher should be. He based these goals on a deep belief "that all students should own their own educations, that future teachers need the experience of course planning, and that this might be a good way to introduce them to collaboration as an approach to use in their own teaching."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In offering this option, Professor M recognized several "great risks" posed by the constructivist approach. First, he noted in a late August e-mail, students are conditioned to expect that the professor will decide on course objectives, content, policies, readings, and assignments before the first class meets. Second, he worried, students "may see the collaborative approach as laziness and lack of preparation on my part" (even though he had fully designed a traditional syllabus as a back up). Third, students may resent having to do the extra work. Fourth, a constructivist class may not be as "efficient" in the sense that it may not cover as much pedagogy as in a traditional course. Last, some of the class members were educated in part outside the United States, and he suspected these students would have even greater expectations that professors be authoritarian.

Anticipating these risks, Professor M took several early steps to diminish the potential for student resistance to the constructivist approach. His colleague e-mail correspondent suggested that he imagine his students' "expectations and likely discomforts" and advised that he take steps to make the classroom feel safe from the very beginning. To do so, Professor M began the first class session with some affective experiences: after an initial get-acquainted discussion, each student in turn was asked to tell two different stories from her or his personal teaching and learning experiences. Only then he did he propose his option. Although he made it clear which option he thought was better, he also explained that he would be comfortable with either decision.

After the students selected the constructivist option, they used problem-based learning techniques to list what they already knew about teaching, what they wanted to know, and where and how they could find that knowledge. They discussed the basic elements that their class syllabus should contain and divided up the responsibilities for drafting these elements: the course objectives, a description of assignments and evaluation/ grading criteria, and a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

session-by-session calendar of topics. (See Appendix.)

Even though the students opted to be constructivists, most at first were apprehensive about their decision. In her journal, EKV wrote that she initially found the class "a bit disconcerting." DSC recorded that she started the course "with doubts and anxiety." Both were particularly concerned with how the group would select class content. "The difficult part is deciding the content of the course when we know so little of the subject," EKV wrote. "Can we really be in charge of the entire class?" DSC asked. "Will we have enough knowledge to come up with the topics to sufficiently cover the body of knowledge addressing pedagogical issues?"

In her journal, AC originally expressed regret that the group chose the constructivist option, for reasons that echoed Professor M's initial predictions of student resistance. From prior experience, AC knew she did not enjoy working in groups. "I rarely had my students work as such, namely because I hated it so much and my feedback from them suggested that they had the same opinion." She was bothered by the course's apparent lack of structure. "I need schema!" She wondered if the constructivist approach was "an easy way out" for the professor because it let the students "do all the work." A self-described "efficiency fiend," AC preferred to "do something on my own immediately instead of dragging it out for weeks as a group."

Also, AC (who had been teaching seven years) and DSC had volunteered to build the course schedule, and AC found the task particularly challenging and frustrating. "It's very difficult to take a class's random thoughts and organize them into a calendar form when you have no idea what the topics involve in the first place." AC found the task to be more difficult because she wanted most "to learn about the learning process" while DSC, who hadn't taught before, seemed "very concerned about the practical side of teaching — how to write a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

syllabus, etc." In her journal, AC opined that the constructivist method would work better when every class member was at the same level of experience and knowledge.

Not all class members reacted to the first day's offer with fear. One of the auditors, LH, was "immediately intrigued" by Professor M's option offer. "This is even better than I expected!" She had taken the same class, taught in a more traditional format, two years earlier in a class of 13 students. She was auditing Professor M's class to refresh her pedagogy knowledge and was excited when she realized how different this version of the course actually could become.

JP was eager to try this new format because she had taken other classes with Professor M and trusted him. "I'm pleased with our decision to construct the class ourselves," she wrote in her journal. "When [Professor M] left the room, I raised the point that this was a learning experience for him as well and that he had mentioned he was nervous about our response. We all seemed to agree it was important to give this a try." Despite any fears, students chose to accept the constructivist format, largely for two reasons — their desire to accommodate Professor M's preference and their confidence in him based on first impressions, his reputation as an excellent teacher, and the trust he exhibited when he left the room so they could decide.

Day Two: Building confidence, facing uncertainty

For the second day of class, Professor M asked each student to prepare to teach some simple concept or skill of their own choosing. He wanted the students to begin teaching as soon as possible "to start with everybody realizing they can do it." The diversity in topics and presentations foreshadowed the tone of the class the entire semester. Topics ranged from the history of toasting to the effective use of visual aids. Learning activities challenged students to write their names in the Korean alphabet, spin a pencil between one's fingers, and play a

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

group hand-eye-and-foot coordination game to spell out a phrase.

DSC was nervous about giving her first mini-lecture and practiced the entire presentation several times before class. Although everything went as DSC expected, in her journal she judged her presentation as "mediocre" and expressed envy of the abilities and calm appearance of other classmates. In building self-confidence, DSC found Professor M's words quite helpful. "He always reminded me that others always learn from me as well and that even I bring valuable learning experiences to class."

The constructivism readings Professor M selected for the second class session also helped students like AC face the uncertainty. "I finally saw and understood what he was doing — how making us do this ourselves will help us gain a better understanding of the learning process as a whole. In this way, the class can be terribly thrilling — being on the brink of discovery and finally seeing how you as an individual might learn differently than others."

Still, AC continued to fear the apparent lack of structure. "This is so unlike my usual classes — taught by me or by others. How will I know if I'm processing this in the right way?" Professor M discovered that student demands for structure were not easily quieted. He and the class members would have to continue to be willing to talk about such concerns, "addressing the uncertainties as best as we could … without either denying the problem or offering a facile solution."

Throughout the semester, constructing a structure

By designing a syllabus, sharing materials and readings, teaching peers, and examining constructivist theory and methods as employed in the class, the students were able to experience constructivism first-hand and foster collaborative learning, ownership, and authenticity. The theory discussed in readings became class members' real-life routine.

Collaborative learning. Collaborative learning in the classroom began the first day when the students began listing course topics and drafting objectives for the course. (See Appendix.) The goals, design, format, and teaching of the course were accomplished collaboratively through the initiative and consensus of the students. Later, when describing the constructivist class, students likened it to a travel agency, a playground or a commune — all places where participants make choices and decisions collectively and move toward goals. Collaborative learning continued throughout the semester in the way the students decided to teach.

Students selected three areas for content: learning styles; teaching theory, overviews and styles; and practical issues such as hiring, tenure, and faculty development. After a rough draft of a schedule was mapped out, the calendar for the course became a work-in-progress with sections being revised and added every three or four weeks. (See Appendix.)

For the first three weeks of class, as the students worked to organize the course and the calendar, Professor M was primarily responsible for selecting each sessions' readings. After that, however, he had sole responsibility for only one class session, and the students divided into pairs who would share the responsibility for teaching the other class sessions. Periodically, the groups changed so that everyone could have an opportunity to work with different members of the class. Before each session, the student team responsible for that topic selected, copied and distributed readings — with Professor M's willing guidance. The team members were then responsible for teaching that session in whatever manner they deemed appropriate. Except for one student's presentation (on the techniques of lecturing), no session relied solely on the lecture format. All class members, including the professor, participated in activities and discussions on an equal level.

These student-taught sessions became the most powerful learning tool in the course.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In this collaborative environment, the students knew they would be responsible not only for their own learning but also for the success of the class as a whole and the learning environment of their peers. The students were able to see and experiment with a wide variety of teaching experiences. The most inexperienced students were afforded frequent and integrated practice in selecting topics, designing lessons, and practicing teaching methods; they also were able to learn through observing and questioning the experienced teachers. The more experienced were able to select and explore advanced topics that fit their needs and interests. They also learned by discussing their experiences with others.

Ownership. Students came to accept this concept through their direct participation in the learning process. As one student said, "It feels good to be in charge of one's own learning." Not only had students decided on organization of the course and content items, they also actively decided course assignments. EKV and JP drafted a preliminary assignments list (see Appendix), which was approved by the entire class. All students had teaching, journal and essay assignments. In addition, the students had several options for individual term-end projects.

Ownership, however, reached a milestone when the professor left for one week to attend a conference. Students began to express their apprehensions about the individual projects they originally had elected to complete as part of course requirements. The class, which had cohered into a committed group, realized that the notion of individual projects felt artificial. What the group really wanted to express was its experiences in a constructivist classroom. For almost two hours, the group practiced problem-based learning techniques by mapping out an approach to researching and composing an article. Students discussed what they already knew, what they needed to know, and where and how to find the information still needed. Only then did they remember the professor and began to question his reaction. Students

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

hoped he would be pleased with their enthusiasm and initiative, yet they so feared his disappointment that they dressed in business attire to formally and professionally present the idea to him when he returned. The professor, however, was delighted that the group had done "better without me present than with me here."

Authenticity: Authenticity is the third concept that makes constructivism so powerful. The pedagogy course was, of course, in the "real world" as students structured the class and taught each other throughout.

Students chose to experiment with pedagogical theories and techniques. For example, early in the semester, a student presented the concept of metacognition by engaging the class in a problem-solving game called "Brick By Brick." This powerful learning experience — students and the instructor reported actually being able to observe their strategizing processes — encouraged the rest of the class to experiment with innovative teaching methods in presentations.

Another class session incorporated a stimulus-response activity to reinforce the conditioned response concepts addressed in that day's readings. Whenever a student participated in discussion, he or she was rewarded with a piece of candy. Students gradually realized the discussion leaders' intentions. After completion of the mini-activity, they discussed the role that the reinforcement played and its connections with the readings.

Through their own "real world" experiences in the class — as both the learners and the teachers — class members discovered how these mini-activities fostered student involvement and long-term learning. Instead of relying on scripted lectures or lengthy and detailed PowerPoint presentations, they experimented with a rich, creative mixture of discussion, educational games, storytelling, concept mapping, drawing (see Figure 1) and brainstorming, all the while grounding the use of their activities in the pedagogical literature. Theory and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

practice were not sequestered. Students drew upon teaching theories for direct application in their own immediate teaching and learning.

Some success in easing discomfort

In a November e-mail message to his colleague, Professor M wrote that he had not encountered the student resistance he originally expected. "The constructivist approach was not a hard sell. Eventually, the discomfort and uncertainties melted away."

One indication that students became quite comfortable with the more-active constructivist approach was how often the class ran over the scheduled 90 minutes. As Professor M reported to his colleague, "Routinely, we continue our discussions for an extra 15 to 20 minutes with nobody watching the clock, fidgeting, or seeming eager to leave." The class met in a fairly small room with fairly hard wooden chairs, a room used for almost all graduate journalism classes. As the students themselves noted, usually in other classes in that room, they would be wiggling and anxious to leave even before 90 minutes. In the pedagogy class, however, it was very easy for everyone to lose track of the time.

Another indication of student comfort level and involvement was continued participation by the two auditors. As Professor M noted in e-mail, typically auditors drop out as other obligations compete for their time. These two auditors did not, and they also carried their share of the mutual teaching load. As one auditor, LH, explained at the end of the semester, "One cannot 'audit' a constructivist class, any more than someone can 'audit' a dance class. There is really no effective way to 'watch' without taking on the responsibilities of a full participant, whether you are formally enrolled or expecting a grade."

Reservations and obstacles

Despite these successes, both the students and Professor M concluded that they still had difficulty fully embracing constructivism. The students, after spending so many years in

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"traditional" educational settings, were often reluctant to abandon notions that the teacher was the absolute authority, that they needed to "cover" the entire course content, and that they had to be externally evaluated, judged and graded.

PC, educated in large part in Taiwan, and DSC, who had spent grades 2-8 in Korea, both emphasized how ingrained were their expectations about grading. While DSC marveled that this was the first class where she felt like she "couldn't be punished," she still wished for more structure and some sort of evaluation process. "This class has no exams, no papers throughout the semester. I felt uncomfortable about that. I have come to equate learning with grades." Throughout her first semester of graduate classes, DSC grew uncomfortable as she came to see grading as more subjective than she once thought. "I always believed that some kind of constant evaluation was necessary. This class is almost too much fun. Can learning and studying actually be fun?"

AC also felt pulled in two directions concerning grading. On one level, she liked the idea of non-graded classes. "However, I'm still at odds on how to motivate people to do well in such situations." Her experiences throughout the semester — as an assistant instructor and as a student in her own graduate classes — left AC with conflicting feelings about the importance of grades. For one class activity, class members were asked to write multiple choice and essay questions to test their understanding of that day's readings, which discussed testing and grading. AC and the other class members found the assignment frustrating. "I'm being to realize just how silly these expectations of regurgitated information are." On the other hand, as a student, AC largely continued to measure her own self-worth based on her exam grades.

In a mid-November class when the discussion topic was grading, Professor M challenged the class to consider grading in light of constructivist philosophy. As he later

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

wrote in an e-mail message, "If the student owns her or his learning, ... then what right does the teacher have to decide whether the student has learned and how well?" While the students generally agreed with Professor M on this point, they did not know how to respond to his next question: How did they want to be graded in *this* course? "This seemed to be something that the four of us didn't really want to face," EKV wrote. "Is that because it felt inappropriate for us to do it? The teacher/ student roles are so ingrained in all of us that it's sometimes hard for us to get out of them."

Near semester's end, the four students who would receive grades in the course expressed more concerns about grading themselves. "Have we really earned A's?" EKV asked, noting that there had been no tests or papers to be assessed. Eventually they decided that grades are used for motivation or discipline and, as JP wrote, "We don't need extrinsic motivation" to continue to work hard through the semester. Their grades, they concluded, should be based on their overall learning. While the students felt they deserved A's, they still felt awkward when presenting this point to Professor M in a short meeting.

Surprises

The students and professor found the time they spent in class both useful and challenging from a cognitive standpoint. They also unexpectedly found that they devoted an equal amount of effort to the affective domain. From the beginning, the professor had worked to establish a warm and supportive environment. Students were encouraged — and later insisted upon — "check in" sessions where all took brief turns sharing concerns, hopes, and achievements. Students threw extra-curricular parties and included as one of their course objectives to "have fun."

Most importantly, the class felt comfortable listening to peers in this non-competitive atmosphere and didn't work to polish their own comments. They worked together, rather than

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

against each other. Students experimented, expressed doubts, shared ignorance, and practiced skills.

Students did feel the constructivist environment, in contrast with a traditional class, requires tremendous emotional investment from all members. LH explained:

> I worried about "stepping on people's toes" or hurting people's feelings in our conversations. I worried about how class members responded to and perceived activities that my partner and I planned for a particular topic. More than anything, I worried about "fitting in." Perhaps one could attribute my reaction to the class size or the individual composition of the class. However, I attribute my reaction in large part to the nature of the collaborative learning environment. Such an environment requires the involvement of the whole individual. More is "laid bare." More is at stake. Likewise, more is to be gained.

Overall, the students felt that trading the "safety" of a traditional educational setting for the more empowering constructivist structure was a risk well worth taking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While the participants in this graduate-level class greatly benefited from the constructivist learning experience, it remains to be seen how well this method would work in other mass communication classes. The graduate students in this study see advantages to constructivist and collaborative procedures in journalism classes generally, although they are a bit more skeptical when applying the concept to undergraduates.

Constructivism and collaborative learning already play a part in journalism skills classes such as editing, reporting, and desktop publishing. These classes are traditionally reserved for upperclassmen — juniors and seniors — who already have a foundation in the subject area and are more motivated to develop the skills they will soon be using in the workforce. Underclassmen, however, might not be as receptive to teaching methods that foster responsibility and encourage students to "own" their own education and earn more freedom in the classroom. Today's freshmen come from a variety of educational backgrounds — as

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

students with 13 years of teacher-centered classrooms and structure, as participants in experimental schools with considerable freedom, and as older students returning after a period in the workforce. Some of these students might be overwhelmed if they are suddenly forced to abandon the familiar traditional learning style.

Underclassmen, therefore, probably need a "warming period" where instructors introduce constructivist methods incrementally in early courses such as Introduction to Mass Communications or Basic Newswriting. Many of these courses have large lectures and after breaking the students into workable groups, or even into individual discussion sections, an instructor could start students thinking about developing their personal strengths, intuitiveness, curiosity about a subject, and critical thinking skills. This does not suggest elimination of the traditional lecture or discussion. Each method has value. Instead, constructivist methods can be inserted within a lecture or discussion. These short periods would change the pace of the lecture and encourage students to think for themselves instead of merely transcribing notes from the overhead or PowerPoint presentation. Instructors can also encourage students to work outside of class, either as individuals or within groups, on a focused objective that they, as a class, helped formulate.

Collaborative learning. Students do not learn in a vacuum; they learn with and from the people around them. In a mass communication classroom, collaborative learning can take many forms. Students can be challenged constructively even in an introductory course by working together on projects such as the development of a journalism textbook geared for elementary students.

Ownership. Students begin to own their own education when they make choices and decisions. In an advanced reported class, for example, instructors might ask students what they recall from basic newswriting and ask what they want to know in addition. If several students want to know more about business writing, medical writing, or sports writing, the instructor can suggest, but not impose, an overall plan of beat reporting with students focusing on their main areas of interest.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In a publications design or desktop publishing course, instructors find out what different levels of ability students have with programs such as QuarkXPress, Illustrator, PhotoShop, and HTML, and have them design the course into units they feel will best suit their needs.

Authenticity. Many journalism instructors are already using this facet of constructivist methodology but are unaware of it. Students working on assigned beats in an advanced reporting class are working with real people in real situations. Are those stories being published in a "real" paper, such as the student weekly/daily, or in class-designed publication that will be distributed to the public? This gives the students a link to reality.

Public relations classes often incorporate authenticity by choosing and developing PR strategies for real firms and organizations.

Students who have had internships or other outside experience can appreciate what is happening in the constructivist classroom. These students have seen collaboration at work and know they will be doing it often in the real world.

For the same reason, the graduate pedagogy course experiment with constructivism was such a success because the participants knew they would someday be using the skills and knowledge they constructed in future jobs — teaching journalism and mass communication.

Evaluation

With group collaborative work, it's only natural to wonder how individual students will be assessed. Constructivism does not naturally lend itself to traditional grading as faculty and students are accustomed. And quite likely, unless the higher education accepts a gradeless society, these methods will not catch on. In constructivism, the goal is for students to advance, but not necessarily to a certain, pre-determined level.

Educator Parker Palmer (1998) says the grading system is here to stay. If so, constructivists will have to find a way to deal with grading.

A constructivist instructor can use self-grading and peer-grading to help determine a final mark and yet meet student, parental and administrative demands. Contract grading might also be useful. The student and instructor develop a contract stating goals and ways to

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

achieve them throughout the semester. "Ideally, the contract should also include a statement of how the quality of the student's work will be judged and what levels of proficiency are necessary to earn a given grade" (Evans, p. 48).

Another assessment method would be for students to keep a portfolio of their work throughout the semester, as suggested by Carole Rich (1997). The instructor can gauge individual improvement by comparing early work with later work as projects are turned in throughout the semester and placed in a portfolio. A panel of experts, which has been briefed by the instructor on college-level expectations, might also assess a student's portfolio. In a photojournalism class this panel might be composed of professional photographers who judge student work in collaboration with the instructor.

While those grading methods lend themselves to mass communication skills classes, theoretical and topics courses will need another system. In these courses, assessment might take the form of carefully phrased and chosen test questions. Students completing group collaborative projects might face essay questions focusing on their topic.

Conclusion

Although Professor M had applied constructivist philosophy to some degree in other classes — by giving students wide options on assignments and course projects — this pedagogy class was his first to be based entirely on constructivism. "When I was asked to teach this pedagogy course, it seemed like a now-or-never opportunity," he explained in a November e-mail. "If constructivism cannot be justified and made to work with this course content, then it hasn't a chance anywhere." Yet, even in November, Professor M still acknowledged the trade-offs involved in the experiment, primarily in two areas: first, the reduced amount of content "covered" using the constructivist approach, and second, whether a total-constructivist approach could work in other classes.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

As Professor M discovered, faculty concerns about the amount of content covered die hard. "I am certain we could have covered much more information, read much more, perhaps even done more active exercises under the traditional approach where I had planned and organized everything. No matter how much I believe in constructivism, giving up this 'coverage' is very hard for me." The auditing student who had taken a traditional pedagogy class two years earlier disagreed with Professor M's assessment of content coverage. Her earlier class had covered different things, and maybe more pages of reading had been assigned. However, the concepts of "pages assigned" or "pages read" do not equate with "pages understood" or "pages synthesized." If "coverage" is measured by the amount of information synthesized, LH felt she clearly covered more content in the constructivist class. Professor M's class also offered far greater opportunities to experiment with active exercises than did her first traditional class.

Professor M in his November e-mail also questioned whether such a 100-percent constructivist approach would work in undergraduate courses or in larger class, even with groups of 25 to 30. He agreed with his e-mail correspondent "that we are saddled to some degree with expectations created by our predecessors." Students have been trained throughout elementary, secondary and higher education to give up control of their learning, to work for grades and diplomas instead of self-fulfillment. Student resistance, anxiety, confusion or suspicion when faced with constructivism is not surprising. The issue, he concluded, is, "Where and how do we break our students' conditioned dependence on us?"

The graduate students in this constructivist class believe that, in higher education, students must begin owning their own learning as soon as possible. Educators can begin the process by incorporating small pieces of constructivism (see Figure 2) into freshman mass communication classes. Instructors who have more mature students or students ready for

more responsibility may incorporate even more collaborative learning, ownership and authenticity.

Constructivism gives students the responsibility for learning and breaks their dependence on instructors, while educators gain the satisfaction of sending students away with skills in critical thinking, collaboration, and self-knowledge. Students become self-directed learners who are better prepared for the lifetime of learning that the real world requires from thoughtful communicators.

References

Barab, S., & Duffy, T. (in press). From practice fields to community practice. In D. Jonassen (Ed.), Theoretical foundations of learning environments. Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Barab, S., Squire, K., & Dueber, W. (1999). Supporting authenticity through participatory learning. Unpublished manuscript.

Beard, J. D., Rymer, J., & Williams, D. L. (1989). An assessment system for collaborative-writing groups: Theory and empirical evaluation. Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 3(2), 29-51.

Belanger, K. & Greer, J. (1992). Beyond the group project: A blueprint for a collaborative writing course. Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 6(1), 99-115.

Brown, J., Collins, A. & Duguid. P. (1989). Situated cognition and the culture of learning. Educational Researcher, 18(1): 32-42.

Cole, M. & Engestrom, Y. (1993). A cultural-historical approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations (pp. 1-46). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt (1990). Anchored instruction and its relationship to situated cognition. Educational Researcher, 19, 2-10.

Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt (1993). Anchored instruction and its relationship to situated cognition. Educational Technology, 33, 52-70.

Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. N.Y.: Macmillan.

Dobos, J. A. (1996). Collaborative learning: Effects of student expectations and communication apprehension on student motivation. Communication Education, 45, 118-134.

Duffy, T. & Cunningham, D. (1996). Constructivism: Implications for the design and delivery of instruction. In D. Jonassen (Ed.), Handbook of research for educational communications and technology. (pp. 170-198). N. Y.: Macmillan.

Duin, A. H. (1991). Computer-supported collaborative writing: The workplace and the writing classroom. Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 5(2), 123-150.

Evans, F. (1976). What research says about grading. In S. B. Simon & J. A. Bellanca (Eds.), Degrading the grading myths: A primer of alternatives to grades and marks (pp. 30-50). Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Forman, J. (1991). Collaborative business writing: A Burkean perspective for future research. The Journal of Business Communication 28(3), 233-257.

Franz, C.R. & Jin, K.G. (1995). The structure of group conflict in a collaborative work group during information system development. Journal of Applied Communication Research, 23, 108-127.

Haber, M. W. (1994). Strategies of collaborative writing and intellectual enrichment. Journalism Educator, 48(4), 47-53.

Kelly, J. D. & Murrie, M. (1995, August). The effects of collaborative learning techniques on student learning and attitudes toward mass communication. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C.

Kornegay, V. (1991). How teaching informs research in graphics field experience. Journalism Educator, 46(1), 38-45.

Kuhn, T. (1970). The structure of scientific revolution. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Lave, J. (1997). The culture of acquisition and practice of understanding. In D. Kirshner

& J. A. Whitson (Eds.), Situated cognition: Social, semiotic, and psychological perspectives (pp. 63-82). Mahwah, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Lay, M. M. (1989). Interpersonal conflict in collaborative writing: What we can learn from gender studies. Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 3(2), 5-28.

Palmer, P. (1998). The courage to teach. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers.

Perkins, D. N. (1993). Person-plus: A distributed view of thinking and learning. In G. Salomon (Ed.), Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational considerations (pp. 88-110). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Phillips, D. C. (1995). The good, the bad, and the ugly: The many faces of constructivism. Educational Researcher, 24(7): 5-12.

Poindexter, P. M. (1998). A model for effective teaching and learning in research methods. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 52(4), 24-36.

Rich, C. (1997). Writing and reporting news: A coaching method. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co.

Saferstein, B. (1992). Collective cognition and collaborative work: The effects of cognitive and communicative processes on the organization of television production. Discourse & Society, 3(1), 61-86.

Schoenfeld, A. (1996). In fostering communities of inquiry, must it matter that the teacher knows the "answer"? For the Learning of Mathematics, 16(3), 11-16.

Stewart, D. C. (1988). Collaborative learning and composition: Boon or bane? Rhetoric Review, 7(1), 58-83.

Wallace, D. L. (1994). Collaborative planning and transforming knowledge. The Journal of Business Communication, 31(1), 41-60.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix

Teaching Mass Communication Objectives

Broadly, our objectives for this class fall into four categories and involve knowledge, practice, attitude, and fun. During this semester, we hope to:

a) explore the theoretical frameworks of learning and of teaching, and the interactions between them. Also, we hope to explore the scholarly research that has attempted to test these theories and concepts. Such research includes the study of cognition, that is, how the mind works — especially how students make connections between old and new knowledge.

b) engage in the active practice of teaching, to test pedagogical theory in the classroom. We hope to develop a process of self-evaluation where we can identify and solve our teaching problems by using our own creative and analytical skills, by drawing on the scholarship of pedagogy, and by drawing on the substantial "community" of resources represented by our students, colleagues, teachers and the university support staff.

c) examine our personal attitudes as teachers and as learners. How do we each want to affect our students? What is our personal philosophy about teaching? What type of learners are we and how does our learning style influence our teaching? How can we achieve our own unique ways of being a *teacher*?

d) enjoy this seminar and have fun learning to teach. How else can we cultivate enthusiasm for learning in others?

Calendar (as finally revised)

8/31: First day of class. After introductions, students opt for total constructivist approach to class and begin to chart course, in part using cognitive mapping.

9/2: Session led by Professor M. Baseline teaching experiences. Everyone teaches a concept and reflects on self as learner and teacher.

9/7: Brainstorming session on draft objectives, calendar and assignments. Discuss readings from Professor M.

9/9 and 9/14: History and philosophy of teaching, led by Professor M.

9/16 and 9/21: Cognitive research on learning, metacognition. Led by EKV and LH.

9/23: In main library, training on ERIC.

9/28: Constructivism, led by PC and AC.

9/30: Problem-based learning, led by PC and AC.

10/5: Gardner's seven intelligences, Myers-Briggs personality types, led by JP and DSC.

10/7: Developmental learning theory, led by EKV and LH.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

10/12: Affective domain, APA principles of learning, led by Professor M.

10/14: Teaching styles — lectures, led by JP and DSC.

10/19: Professor X, special guest, leads a session on constructivism and how to lead a problem-based learning session.

10/21: Teaching styles — discussion, led by PC and AC.

10/28: Discussion by group about collaborative paper.

11/2: Presentation of collaborative paper proposal to Professor M by group. Class paper planning — Topic: Collaborative learning in a constructivist class on journalism mass communication pedagogy.

11/4: Teaching formats — new technologies in the classroom, distance learning, computer classrooms, applications, etc., led by PC and EKV.

11/9: Teaching skills — course planning, syllabus writing, crafting assignments, etc, led by JP and AC.

11/11: Subjective vs. objective evaluation/assignments, led by DSC and LH.

11/16: The Great Debate begins — teaching vs. research, led by LH and PC.

11/18: The Great Debate, Part II — In defense of Humboldt, etc., led by AC, JP, and Professor M.

11/21: Potluck at LH's. Everyone contributes something different.

11/23: The Great Debate, Part III — tenure, teacher training and development, pedagogy classes, led by EKV and DSC.

11/30 and 12/2: Group members individually visit different "master teachers" on campus.

12/7 and 12/9: Discussions on visits to "master teachers." Work as group on paper. Discussion of individual teaching philosophy statements.

Finals Week: Personal teaching philosophies due.

Assignments (preliminary)

1) Students will present lectures during the semester to the class on topics that the class has elected to study. The students will also lead discussion of the topic following the lecture. In addition, the students will present the class with possible readings on the content area.

2) Students will keep a journal during the class. This journal will consist of thoughts about the collaborative teaching experience, notes and thoughts on teaching, self-evaluations of the student's style throughout the semester.

3) Students will complete a self-reflective essay or teaching philosophy essay for the end of the semester.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

4) Students will have a choice of one or more of the following as a semester project(s):

a) an academic paper relating the experience of the class prepared for conference/journal acceptance.

b) complete a paper on teacher observations done during the semester. The student may shadow two or three professors, examine their course materials, discuss philosophies and compare and contrast teaching styles.

c) prepare materials for a course, complete with syllabus, weekly plans, assignments, tests, readings.

d) complete an academic research paper on an aspect of pedagogy.

e) prepare a proposal for an educational research project including a literature review, methodology, etc.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

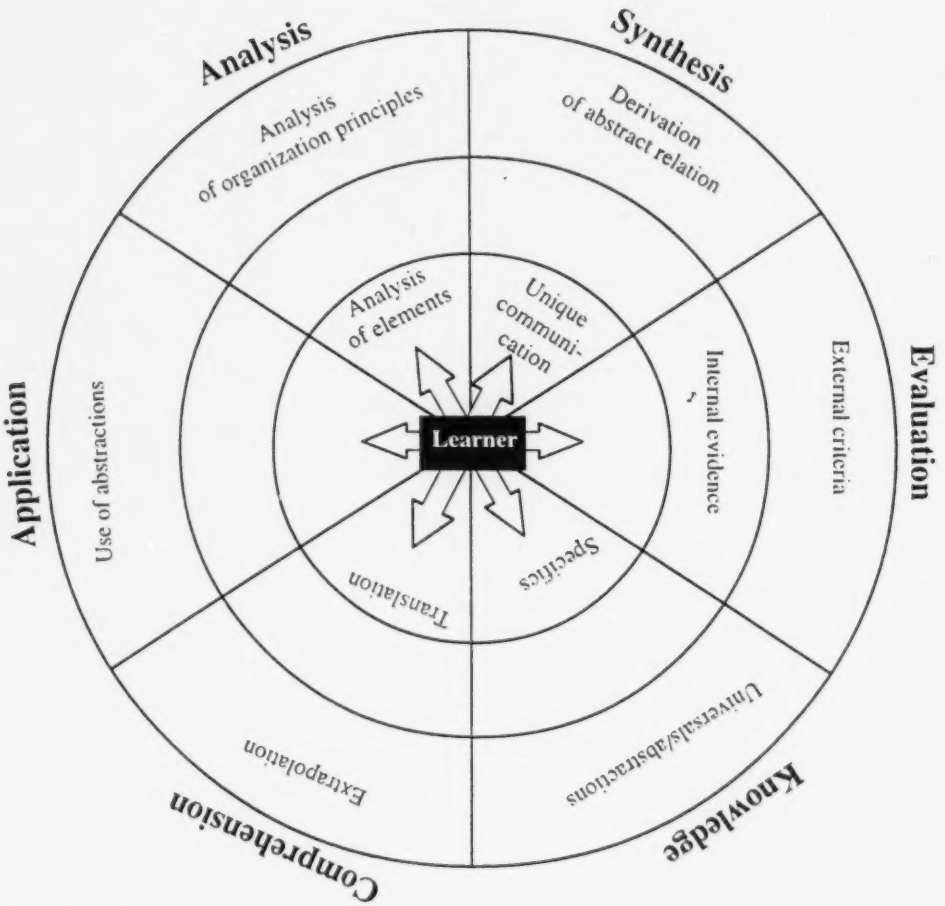

Figure 1. Students in the graduate-level pedagogy class worked with concept mapping and other visual learning tools such as the one above, which shows movement through levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

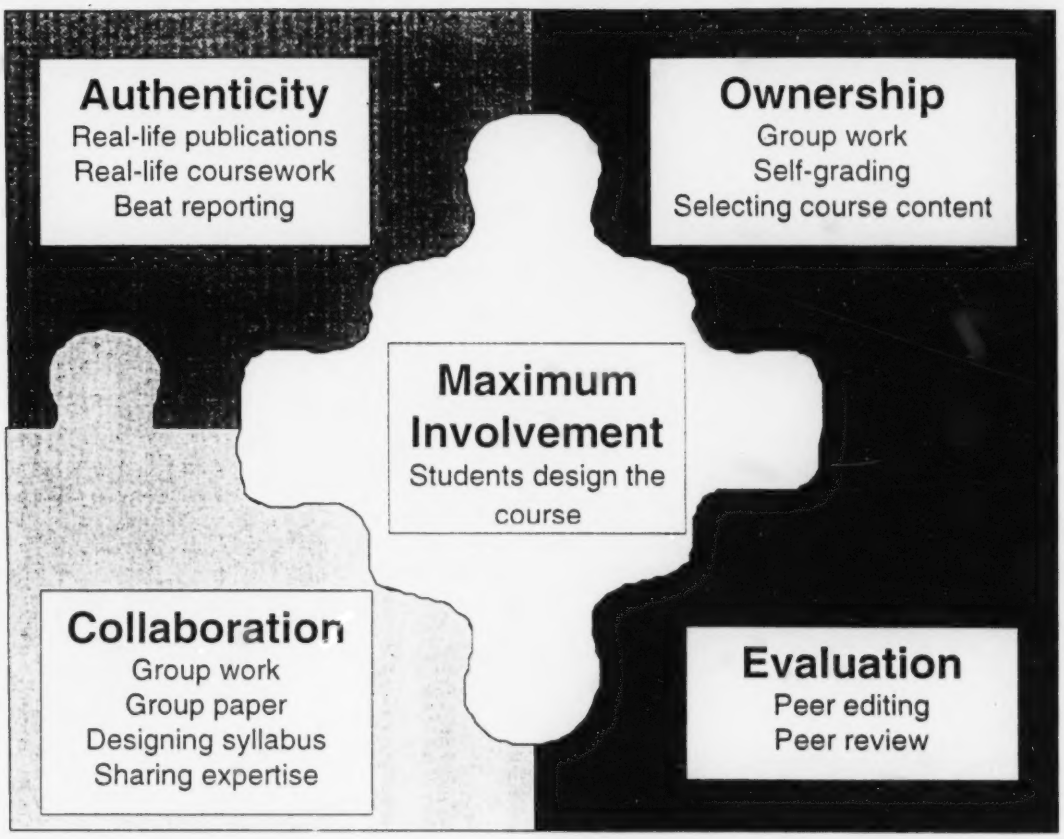

Figure 2. Journalism educators may use a minimal amount of constructivism, as a way of introducing the method to students, or incorporate all of the values – authenticity, ownership, collaboration and evaluation – to achieve maximum constructivist involvement in the classroom.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE